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ABSTRACT

The superintendent of the Bibb County, Georgia, Public School System devised a program to develop a cadre of competent administrators to assume leadership positions as they became vacant. The Leadership Development Program took 18 classroom teachers with administrative aspirations and provided them with a variety of experiences under the guidance of carefully selected local school leaders. The primary activities included extended interaction with the superintendent and his staff, with the program's university coordinator, with the supervising administrators to whom the interns were assigned, and among the interns as a group. In addition, the interns took courses from the University of Georgia. The program completed its initial year of operation in June 1987, producing 18 leaders who are familiar with the leadership philosophy of the district and who have demonstrated leadership skills in the work setting. (MLF)

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# FIELD-BASED PREPARATION FOR LEADERSHIP PERSONNEL

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# FIELD BASED PREPARATION FOR LEADERSHIP PERSONNEL

What usually happens in school systems when administrative vacancies occur is that individuals are selected on the basis of the strengths of their applications, letters of recommendation, and interviews. Rarely do local superintendents have the opportunity to view individuals performing administrative tasks prior to selecting them for administrative positions. Under these conditions, local superintendents may consider themselves fortunate when they select beginning administrators who demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills on the job. They are even more fortunate when they select individuals whose personal philosophies closely match those of the district.

Attention has recently been directed to the characteristics of "effective" schools and the roles of the leaders in the schools. Because such leadership is too important to be left to the frailty of the usual administrative employment process, the superintendent of the Bibb County (Georgia) Public School System devised a program to develop a cadre of competent administrators to assume leadership positions as they become vacant. The Leadership Development Program took 18 classroom teachers with administrative aspirations and provided them with a variety of experiences under the guidance of carefully selected local school leaders. The primary activities included

extended interaction with the superintendent and his staff, with the program's university coordinator, with the supervising administrators to whom the interns were assigned, and among the interns as a group. In addition, the interns took courses from the University of Georgia. The program completed its initial year of operation in June of 1987, producing 18 leaders who are familiar with the leadership philosophy of the district and who have demonstrated leadership skills in the work setting.

## Structure of the Program

More than 80 classroom teachers applied for acceptance to the program in the spring of 1986. The selection criteria specified that the applicants be exemplary teachers with certification no lower than a master's level, have at least a 3.3 graduate grade point average, the recommendation of the current administrator, and express as willingness to continue serving in the system for at least three years after the program's completion. Thirty of the applicants were selected for in-depth screening by the superintendent and his staff.

Through a careful process, which included as rigorous interview and intense scrutiny of academic ability, communication skill, adaptability, confidence, receptivity to new ideas, and commitment to the district, 18 of the applicants were selected and assigned to veteran administrators outside their own school setting. Seventeen

were placed in schools under the supervision of principals and one in the central office with the superintendent. Though the plan originally specified that interns would teach one-half day, favorable scheduling and the availability of personnel allowed many to intern full time. In addition to working under the direct supervision of experienced administrators, the interns attended monthly seminars conducted by the superintendent and his staff, met twice a month with the university coordinator, and took one graduate course per quarter from the University of Georgia.

## The Superintendent's Role

The inspiration for the Leadership Development Program grew from Superintendent Thomas Hagler's career-long dissatisfaction and frustration with finding qualified administrators through the usual hiring process. Even with state-of-the-art personnel policies in effect, districts still play a costly game in attempting to predict the performance of prospective administrators from their recommendations and academic qualifications alone. The risk of hiring administrators whose educational leadership is unproven has recently been underscored by the effective schools research emphasis on the critical role of leadership in a school's effectiveness and by the focus of such external agencies as government and business on the quality of instruction occurring in schools. Bibb County's need for instructional leadership is intensified by a 57% minority

enrollment, mediocre test scores, and large numbers of "at risk" students.

Both the superintendent's dissatisfaction with the traditional administrative selection process and the district's intense focus on instructional leadership at the building level combined to cause the superintendent to seek a feasible means to address both problems simultaneously. That search led him to approach Kenneth M. Matthews, a former superintendent-turned-college professor of educational administration, about the prospect of developing a leadership development program to ensure the district's future supply of administrative and supervisory personnel. The program's primary objective would be to train currently employed district personnel to assume leadership positions as they become available by providing each person with specific administrative skills and by focusing the training on instructional effectiveness.

Although the superintendent's staff and the school board were receptive, perfecting the details of the program and securing the $250,000 needed to finance it took several years. In the spring of 1986, the superintendent invited interested and qualified personnel to apply, applications were taken, and screening began. In the summer, interviews were conducted and selections and placements made. By fall, eighteen administrative interns were in place and the Leadership Development Program was underway.

The superintendent's role extended beyond that of creator and initiator of program activities to that of active participant. From the screening interviews to the initial gathering of participants and throughout the year's activities, the superintendent lent support by expressing pride and expectations for the achievement and performance of all involved and by his presence at program activities and in schools. Through both formal and informal meetings with the group and with individual interns, the superintendent shared personal successes, offering encouraging advice, upholding the program's standards, and monitoring its operation. To extend each intern's association with the system's personnel and to ensure understanding of the symbiotic functioning of an effective organization, the superintendent directed such key personnel as curriculum directors and the directors of pupil services, research, special programs, personnel, and finance and support services to meet with the interns to explain their departments' functions and the procedures for securing their services. Thus, every intern experienced not only the superintendent's personal and professional support, but the assurance that all the system's leaders would contribute to the interns' successful entry into positions of administrative responsibility.

## The University Coordinator's Role

The program's university coordinator, Kenneth M. Matthews, functioned as a catalyst and organizer in the

support network provided to the administrative interns. Secured by the system in the dual capacity of administrator of the operation and supervisor of the interns at their work sites, the coordinator served as the central liaison figure, facilitating the program's component operations and protecting the personal and professional interests of all parties. In addition, he planned and conducted semimonthly seminars.

The primary focus of the seminars was the conceptual and theoretical bases for instructional leadership. To support these seminars, the coordinator provided interns with copies of approximately 125 articles and book chapters addressing effective schools and effective instructional leadership., However, other topics addressed included pupil personnel administration, staff personnel administration, school-community relations, and elements of problem-solving.

The coordinator's other activities involved on-site visits with interns and their supervisors and the supervision of special projects. An example of one such project is the mapping of vocabulary curriculum in the elementary schools. Others include assessing teacher motivations to improve student achievement and diagnosing curricular deficiencies from local student test scores.

As vital as the coordinator's nuts-and-bolts administrative functioning was to the success of the program, it was his supervisory role that quickly became critical to the well-being of the group, and therefore to

the program. Because involvement in a novel and elite program generated some predictable insecurities and frustrations among interns and their supervisory administrators alike, the coordinator alternated roles as parent, intermediary, cheerleader, and friend. That functioning removed obstacles to communication by encouraging individual efforts while coordinating them for the common good. A major thrust of these experiences was for the interns to understand the leadership philosophy underlying current practices, to contrast practices, to contrast these with alternative practices described in the professional literature, and to examine their personal philosophies in relation to current practice and philosophy.

## The Supervising Administrator's Role

The support most crucial to the Leadership Development Program was that provided by the supervising administrators. It was designed to provide the beginning administrator with the experience, judgment, and confidence needed to function independently. The intent was never to encourage imitation, but rather to develop the potential for independent initiatives.

The pairing of virtual strangers whose experience and philosophies might prove incompatible held the possibility for the dissatisfaction of the individuals and for irreparable damage to the program's objectives. Therefore, the assigning of interns to supervisors was carefully done.

The effort to match complementary personalities had to be balanced against the critical considerations of their respective strengths and weaknesses and the logistics of scheduling. Fortunately, the results were satisfactory in all cases and inspired in some.

The supportive relationships formed slowly, despite the shared exuberance of the participants and the determination of most partners to make their alliance successful. Each partner had to learn the idiosyncrasies of the other, to discern biases and hidden agendas, and to treat areas of reluctance and insecurity gingerly. In fact, both interns and administrators confessed later that in the early days and weeks they had felt varying degrees of self-consciousness and insecurity about such sensitive matters as the transfer of responsibility, the wisdom of offering suggestions or opposing views, the other's true opinion of his or her performance. Each person's roles and territories still had to be carefully developed.

The role the supervising administrators was to play was intentionally defined only by the superintendent's charge to allow the intern to "be your shadow for the next ten months." Prescribing exact administrative behaviors rather than a range of desirable experiences would have robbed the administrators of autonomy and the individuality which had made them desirable as role models.

The early discomfort that both interns and administrators gradually evolved into easy corporation,

nourished primarily through the routine of daily interaction and the sharing of experiences. Most administrators, anxious to challenge without overwhelming, adjusted the amount of direction and support offered to the interns' needs and administrative maturity.

By the end of the year, through supportive efforts of everyone involved in the program and the shared objective that interns be as fully prepared as possible to assume leadership positions, each intern had experiences in every area of administrative responsibility originally designated as critical to the system's needs. What had once been uncharted territory was now familiar enough to inspire confidence that the scope and depth of the interns' preparation was adequate to prepare them to function successfully when opportunities arose.

## The Team of Interns

Ironically, the relationships that the interns found the most supportive and satisfying, and which may ultimately benefit the system the most, were not the ones carefully structured by the program's design, but the ones that developed naturally among the 18 interns. Tough the program's participants differed in age, race, level of instruction, and philosophy, their eventual growth into a close personal and professional support group was inevitable from the beginning. While personally exhilarated by their selection and by the prospect of new careers as

administrators, the interns also feared failure and its consequences to their futures. When the opening formalities were over and the officials gone, the interns initial nervousness subsided to allow the relieved sharing of common emotions. That spontaneous exchange not only lay the foundation for the collegial relationships that would eventually evolve, but also signaled the central theme of the year's association--interdependence and support.

The practical need for interdependence quickly manifested itself; within two weeks, most interns had abandoned their peripheral involvement in the activities of their new assignments and had become deeply involved in their new administrative responsibilities. Meantime, the university's courses in administration and supervision had begun, as had the seminars in instructional leadership, each claiming an afternoon and evening of time. Personal lives had to be curtailed and arranged to fit the increasingly demanding schedule.

Thus, the semimonthly seminars quickly became the eagerly awaited opportunities for the interns to gather, to share their frustrations and triumphs with impunity, to pose problems and offer solutions, and to measure their own perceptions and experiences against those of their peers. For those interns struggling to merge as administrators, the sharing that had begun as easy comraderie soon developed into a support group. This intense relationship served to

provide the necessary foundation for individual growth and development and should ensure the continued development of professional relationships among the county's administrators.

## University Courses

In addition to earning 15 quarter hours of graduate credit in internship for the year, each intern enrolled in a 5 hour course each quarter. These courses were taught in Bibb County by University of Georgia professors. Except for those who had previously taken the specific courses offered, each intern enrolled in "Introduction to Supervision" taught by Edith Grimsely, "Administration of the School Curriculum" taught by Ray Bruce, and "Public School Business Management" taught by Kenneth Matthews. "Introduction to Supervision" and "Administration of the School Curriculum" were selected because the content offered by these two professors provides a superior academic base for instructional leadership. "Public School Business Management" was chosen because the content of this course orients students to the noninstructional aspects of educational administration.

## The Results

At this time 14 of the 18 interns have been employed as administrators or supervisors in the Bibb County Public Schools. Of the nine elementary interns, one was placed as

principal, one as curriculum director, and seven as assistant principals. Of the nine secondary interns, two were assigned as assistant principals, three as associate principals for instruction, and four returned to classrooms until more administrative vacancies occur. Consideration is now being given as to how soon another group of teachers should be provided similar experiences.